DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 666 HE 022 767

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TITLE Stalking the Academic Communist. Intellectual Freedom and the Firing of Alex Novikoff.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-87451-469-X
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 300p.
AVAILABLE FROM University Press of New England, Hanover, NH 03755 ($14.95).
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Freedom; Activism; Case Studies; *Civil Liberties; *Communism; Dissent; Educational Environment; Government (Administrative Body); Government Role; Government School Relationship; Higher Education; Intellectual Freedom; Political Attitudes; Social Behavior; Social Values
IDENTIFIERS Blacklists; *McCarthyism; *Novikoff (Alex); University of Vermont

ABSTRACT

The mechanics of McCarthyism are explained via a detailed case study of Alex Novikoff who was fired from the University of Vermont in 1953 after taking the Fifth Amendment in connection with FBI and Congressional investigations of his earlier membership in Communist groups at Brooklyn College. Despite McCarthy's stated commitment to academic freedom, the nation's colleges and universities succumbed to anti-Communist furor during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Hundreds of professors lost their jobs, thousands more shunned controversy in order to retain theirs, and hundreds of thousands of students learned that dissidence was dangerous and criticism of the status quo unwise. This investigation of McCarthyism looks at institutions as well as individuals, bureaucratic procedures, and political ideologies. Nine chapters focusing on Novikoff's case are as follows: origins of political activism; consequential acts; confronted by the anti-Communists; disengagement and retreat; inquisition and the unraveling of a life; exposure and notoriety; the first ripples of dissent; the final hearing; and remaking a life and career. Three appendices provide the following: important names in the Novikoff life story; security history of Alex Novikoff; and special sources. (SM)

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